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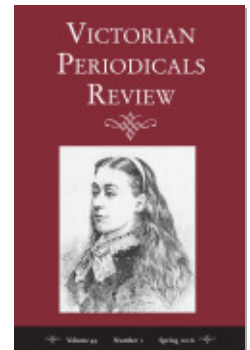
## Oscar Wilde and the French Press, 1880–91

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# Oscar Wilde and the French Press, 1880–91

REBECCA N. MITCHELL

Writing in *Le Gaulois* in 1891, Robert Harborough Sherard heralded the return of his friend Oscar Wilde to France with a panegyric both to Wilde and to Wilde's French tastes. To see a happy man, Sherard wrote, simply look for Wilde "in the corner of a grand restaurant on the boulevard, dining as the French do, chatting about French things with those who love France."<sup>1</sup> Wilde's French-based happiness corresponded, not coincidentally, with his return to writerly activity. In Sherard's telling, the negative (British) critical response to Wilde's first major publication, his 1881 volume *Poems*, was the cause of a long dry spell: "One might have said the young poet was sickened by so much malevolent talk on the one hand and by so much scorned popularity on the other. For many years, he kept silent and, apart from some prefaces of courtesy and a few articles, his pen produced nothing."<sup>2</sup> According to this narrative, it was only at the urging of his friends that Wilde returned to composition. "From all sides," Sherard writes, "Wilde was pressed to break the contemptuous silence he had imposed upon himself. Happily, the arguments of his friends prevailed, and with his novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, Oscar Wilde again faced the English public and critics."<sup>3</sup>

Sherard's account of Wilde's French days has since come under question—and for good reason. As one of Wilde's first friends in France and as someone with literary ambitions of his own, Sherard had a personal stake in being credited with facilitating the French discovery of the author. More pressing than such individual bias is the fundamental incompleteness of Sherard's account. As recent scholarship has shown, Wilde was writing prolifically during the 1880s, and the significance of this period has been granted increasing prominence in academic treatments of his work.<sup>4</sup> And while the centrality of France to Wilde's ultimate trajectory—as well as the author's "lifelong preoccupation" with French literature—has never

been questioned, most scholars still concur that France paid Wilde little if any attention until the 1890s, after the publication of *Dorian Gray* (1890, rev. 1891).<sup>5</sup> Yet the French periodical press did, in fact, attend to each of the major developments in Wilde's career. This article traces some of that reception history, considering dozens of contemporary articles never before discussed. In doing so, it extends the work of other scholars by demonstrating that the French press responded to Wilde's writing both earlier—throughout the 1880s—and in a more sustained fashion than previously thought. It thereby adds nuance to our understanding of Wilde's French reception and enriches our perception of these important early years in his development as an author.

Sherard's was not the only account that positioned France and the French reception of Wilde's works as a corrective to the stolid British critics who refused to give the author his due. In an article often cited as one of the first works in French to treat Wilde as an author and not simply an aesthetic phenomenon,<sup>6</sup> Téodor de Wyzewa suggested that "prior to the month of December 1891, when M. Wilde returned to Paris, the English—his compatriots—did not know how to appreciate him."<sup>7</sup> Hughes Le Roux, beating Wyzewa to the punch by a month, wrote in *Le Figaro* that "this writer enjoys in England, in America, in all the British language countries, a popularity attached as much to his person as to his works."<sup>8</sup> Both journalists further asserted that the French reading public was unfamiliar with Wilde: Le Roux "would wager that many readers of this paper will hear the name of Mr. Oscar Wilde pronounced here for the first time" while Wyzewa insisted that the French "had seen nothing of his works . . . except a little moral story of little significance."<sup>9</sup> The keen insight afforded by the French was not, according to these authors, due to an intimate familiarity with Wilde's writing but rather to an innate sympathy with the man. Yet as readers of *Le Figaro* and other journals had many opportunities to read Wilde's name, Le Roux and Wyzewa—perhaps like Sherard—seemed to overstate their case in an effort to stake claim on already trodden ground.

Wilde began his first extended stay in Paris in January 1883, shortly after returning from his initial professional foray onto the international scene—an exhaustive 1882 lecture tour of the United States where he served as advance guard to Richard D'Oyly Carte's touring production of Gilbert and Sullivan's *Patience*. He spent three months in Paris before depleting his funds and repairing to London. Wilde honeymooned in Paris in 1884<sup>10</sup> but apparently did not return to France again until 1891, where his reception included the abovementioned articles by Sherard, Le Roux, and Wyzewa.<sup>11</sup> The biographies Sherard went on to write have been treated as essential documents of Wilde's time in France, partly because of Sherard's close friendship with Wilde during his French visits. More recent biographers have adopted much of Sherard's narrative even while questioning his

analysis. In his still-definitive 1987 biography of Wilde, Richard Ellmann notes that “Sherard was bumptious, wrongheaded, uncomprehending” but allows that his account was necessary source material.<sup>12</sup> Perhaps the longevity of Sherard’s biographies, which include references to Le Roux and Wyzewa, helps to explain why this account and these writers’ works have become entrenched in the critical literature.

The 2010 publication of *The Reception of Oscar Wilde in Europe*, edited by Stefano Evangelista, marked a major step forward in the study of Wilde’s reception history.<sup>13</sup> France was, Evangelista writes, “both the first European country to show widespread awareness of Wilde and . . . the centre from which his work reached countries such as Italy and Spain.”<sup>14</sup> Three chapters in the collection address Wilde’s French connections from 1891 and after. In fact, most of the scholarly work on Wilde’s early French reception—headed by Nancy Erber’s “The French Trials of Oscar Wilde” (1996) and Richard Hibbitt’s “The Artist as Aesthete: The French Creation of Wilde” (2010)—suggests that Wilde disappeared from view in the French press after his first visit.<sup>15</sup> Erber, who cites the advent of the trials as a turning point in Wilde’s renown among the French public, argues that he was “little known by the larger reading public before 1895” and that the “London scandals brought [him] . . . to the front page of the daily newspapers.”<sup>16</sup> Hibbitt draws similar conclusions, though he moves the start date back by a few years, noting that “there is little evidence of . . . French reception in the 1880s except for one of the first recorded translations of Wilde’s works, an unsigned French version of [‘The Birthday of the Infanta’]” which appeared on March 30, 1889.<sup>17</sup> This leads him to conclude that “1891 can be viewed as the birth of Wilde’s reception in France.”<sup>18</sup> This idea is supported by Paul Barnaby’s quite thorough “Timeline of the European Reception of Oscar Wilde,” also in Evangelista’s collection, which claims that the first critical work on Wilde in French was published in 1891: Le Roux’s piece in *Le Figaro* and an interview with Wilde in *L’Écho de Paris*.<sup>19</sup> In “Oscar Wilde, Poète Anglais / Oscar Wilde, Écrivain Français” (2006), D. C. Rose expresses surprise at the lack of treatment of Wilde’s work in French and includes an admittedly selective chronological bibliography that begins with M. A. Raffolovich’s *L’Affaire Oscar Wilde* (1895).

Even more recently, Joseph Donohue’s masterful edition of Wilde’s early plays includes a detailed account of the author’s relationship with France and the French basis of *Salomé*. He writes that “beginning in the 1880s and continuing through the end of that decade and into the next, Paris remained increasingly in Wilde’s travel plans and on his mind, in one way or another.”<sup>20</sup> Still, the earliest French publication he cites is an 1895 article by Adolphe Retté in *La Plume*, and the cast of characters most directly

connected with these narratives, André Gide and Pierre Louÿs foremost among them, were acquaintances that Wilde met only during his 1891 stay.<sup>21</sup> Scholarly focus on Wilde's 1891 reception in France is not limited to scholarship on Wilde's works in English; French studies, including Jacques de Langlade's *Oscar Wilde, écrivain français* (1975) and Herbert Lottman's *Oscar Wilde à Paris* (2007), trace a similar timeline. There is no doubt that 1891 marked a watershed in Wilde's career and in his critical reception in France, but the years preceding his return to Paris were important as well. This earlier period coincided with the "golden age" of French dailies, along with the vast expansion of specialized weekly and monthly magazines under the Third Republic, the range of which offered multiple platforms for responses to British writing.<sup>22</sup> In the remainder of this essay, I will survey a variety of pre-1891 articles in the French periodical press that help to contextualize Wilde's developing authorial voice.

### "Véritable Poésie"

One of the earliest treatments of Wilde's work in the French press was written by one of his "compatriots": the astute British critic Joseph Knight, whose work Wilde later reviewed. Fluent in French, Knight was a regular contributor to the newly founded *Le Livre*, for which he reviewed Wilde's *Poems* in October 1881, less than four months after its London publication. Generally dismissive of what he terms the productions of the "esthétiques" (later phrasing would term them "esthètes"), Knight describes the "vogue" as a "new development of the movement that was produced in support of the school of painting known under the name of Pre-Raphaelitism."<sup>23</sup> Explaining that the poems aspire to a "terrestrial" rather than to a "sublime" existence, Knight singles out "Charmides"—"the longest and most important [poem] of the volume"—as "exceeding the audacity" of Baudelaire's *Fleurs du mal* and "affecting a vulgarity unequaled in contemporary literature."<sup>24</sup> Nevertheless, Knight acknowledges that the other poems in the volume demonstrate that "M. Wilde possesses a vein of true poesy" ("véritable poésie"), even if the book as a whole is a "sample of the Gongorism that . . . invaded our literature."<sup>25</sup> Despite this reaction to Wilde's work, Knight was no stranger to Pre-Raphaelitism, and *Le Livre* provided him with a platform for voicing his approbation; his highly positive notice of Dante Gabriel Rossetti's *Ballads and Sonnets* in December 1881 drew an appreciative response from the poet.<sup>26</sup> When Knight demonstrated his affection for Rossetti in an 1887 biography, Wilde's review for the *Pall Mall Gazette* pulled no punches, calling it "A Cheap Edition of a Great Man." The review casts Knight's effort as "just the sort of biography Guildenstern might have written of Hamlet" and concludes that the

“whole scheme and method” of the work is “radically wrong.”<sup>27</sup> Wilde particularly scrutinizes Knight’s “rollicking indifference” to the punctuation and even word choices in Rossetti’s verse, noting that “there is not one single poem” quoted in the biography “that does not display some careless error or some stupid misprint.”<sup>28</sup> It is unclear if Wilde was aware of Knight’s 1881 review of *Poems*. There is no mention of Knight in Wilde’s collected letters, and while biographers offer an account of Knight’s dismissive comments regarding *Lady Windermere’s Fan* (1892), they do not reference his earlier review in French.<sup>29</sup>

The trajectory from Wilde’s demonstrably derivative poetry collection to the breezy confidence of his later pieces is complex. Bridging the gap was the evolution of his writerly voice by way of his lecturing: during his American tour, the French press covered Wilde’s movements, even if its coverage was less extensive than in Britain or America. In 1882, *Le Temps*’s “Lettres d’Angleterre” noted the rise of the “manie esthétique” as documented by cartoons in *Punch* and on the stage in *Patience* and F. C. Burnand’s *The Colonel*.<sup>30</sup> “All eyes,” the article insisted, “were on the young Irish writer who had had success at Oxford. . . . To further increase his prestige, the young priest of the ‘aesthetes,’ after having published a volume of verse, sailed for America, where his fame preceded him.”<sup>31</sup> The more conservative, Royalist *Le Gaulois* dedicates an August 1882 front-page column to “Les Æsthetics,” an overview of the movement that includes extended quotations from George Du Maurier’s *Punch* cartoons, excerpts of dialogue from *Patience*, descriptions of aesthetic décor (“a peacock feather or sunflower for all decorations”), and a reference to Wilde as the “poète esthétique par excellence,” whose lecture tour earned him “not a little laughter and mockery, but also quite a few dollars.”<sup>32</sup> French periodicals also monitored the reaction of the American press to the aesthete in their midst. The *Bibliothèque universelle et revue suisse* (a literary review printed in Paris as well as Geneva) notes that Wilde “is touring the United States to become famous by converting the Yankee to aestheticism” in anticipation of “American newspapers reporting his exploits.”<sup>33</sup> A few months later, the same journal reminds its readers of Wilde’s reputation: “In England the cult of aesthetes languishes, bereft of its orator, the young Oscar Wilde. We perhaps remember that Oscar Wilde had gone to preach fashion reform and revival of taste to the Yankees.”<sup>34</sup>

As in England, the appellation “priest” or “apostle” of aestheticism proved to be enduring, but there were signs that Wilde was regarded as something beyond a mere evangelist.<sup>35</sup> By 1883, Wilde’s first play *Vera: Or, the Nihilists* was staged in the United States, where a reporter covered the play and its reception for the *Revue britannique*: “The nihilist drama by Oscar Wilde, *Vera*, gives rise to the most diverse criticisms, which does not

prevent the author from considering it a success. The truth is that there are tedious parts and that the plot is faulty, but the comic or picturesque scenes in it are sufficient for the mass of American viewers to accept it.”<sup>36</sup> Faint praise indeed. However, the author seems to understand that the French, like the Americans, are curious about Wilde: “Oscar Wilde has just finished another drama in five acts, *The Duchess of Padua*. The action takes place in the fifteenth century in Italy. The English author evidently wants to exploit the wealth of successful American theaters. . . . I will keep you informed of his attempts.”<sup>37</sup> Interestingly, the notice makes no mention of Wilde’s aestheticism.

### Wilde’s “Réformes”

From 1883 to 1885, Wilde’s lectures in Britain provided a steady if labor-intensive source of income. Just as his own dress underwent a transformation in the course of these years (a fact widely noted in the British press), his lectures on fashion and dress reform focused on advocating a revolution in sartorial trends.<sup>38</sup> More importantly, these lectures marked a transition in Wilde’s work from public orator to writer. While Wilde had generally included some discussion of fashion in his lectures “The Renaissance of Art in England,” “House Beautiful,” and their variants, his first lecture devoted wholly to dress occurred on October 1, 1884. A lengthy notice appeared in the *Pall Mall Gazette* the following day, which gave rise to a series of letters to the editor from readers and from Wilde himself that continued through the end of the year, culminating with his essay “The Philosophy of Dress,” printed the following April in the *New York Daily Tribune*.<sup>39</sup> This lively discussion made an impression well beyond Great Britain and the United States, as extended responses to his call to arms appeared in a few French papers. “La Réforme du costume,” an unsigned piece in the January 1885 *Le Temps*, offered a review of Wilde’s recent writing on dress reform: “We know that a new kind of apostle, M. Oscar Wilde, has continued in England for some time a crusade against contemporary dress; he endeavors to demonstrate its absurdity under the triad of convenience, elegance, and hygiene” (“le triple rapport de la commodité, de l’élégance et de l’hygiène”).<sup>40</sup> This final phrase mimics the diction of Wilde’s essay “More Radical Ideas upon Dress Reform,” which appeared in the *Pall Mall Gazette* and was addressed to the “many wise and charming people, who have at heart the principles of health, freedom, and beauty in costume.”<sup>41</sup> The writer in *Le Temps* seems playfully skeptical of Wilde’s central arguments, but the piece ends with a thoughtful, if sarcastic, point: “As often happens with reformers, Oscar Wilde has no problem when he sticks to criticizing what *is*; where he becomes more difficult to follow is when he



tries to suggest rational principles that will suit the fashion of the future.”<sup>42</sup> It further notes that Wilde seems really to be advocating retrogressive, not forward-looking, attire.<sup>43</sup> The writer concludes that Wilde “is too ambitious in tackling the whole outfit at once” and wishes that he would “limit his propaganda” to the “dreadful top hat.”<sup>44</sup> This article was reprinted in *Le Rappel* the following week and reached as far as Rhône-Alpes, where it was excerpted in a local paper.<sup>45</sup> *Le Petit Parisien*—a moderate Republican magazine with a middle-class readership<sup>46</sup>—followed suit with “Révolution dans la mode” on January 31, 1885, also adopting phrasing similar to Wilde’s: “Oscar Wilde, a consummate strategist, focused his efforts on two fronts at once: the aesthetic and the healthy, beauty and ease, the agreeable and the useful.”<sup>47</sup>

Wilde’s writing on dress reform provoked a longer piece from literary critic Gustave Geffroy. In a January 1885 essay, Geffroy deploys mock seriousness to stage a self-deprecating defense of the top hat, which Wilde had critiqued in his *Pall Mall Gazette* pieces.<sup>48</sup> Like the writers in *Le Temps* and *Le Petit Parisien*, Geffroy picks up Wilde’s phrasing, writing that Wilde seeks “to prove that coats, vests and pants are not healthy, comfortable, or elegant.”<sup>49</sup> Intoning the nationalism that would often accompany descriptions of Wilde’s person or works, Geffroy defends grey and black. He chides Wilde for being “so obsessed by ideas of blues and pink, by memories of silk stockings and soft boots” that he failed to realize that “our fabrics were the color of our thoughts and the hideous, torturing top hat that we wear was but the meaningful emblem of our melancholy.”<sup>50</sup> A similar argument in favor of French black was launched by *L’Univers illustré*, which derided the suggestion that all would go well if the French gave over “l’habit noir” in favor of “l’habit rose.”<sup>51</sup> The sense of dubiousness toward Wilde’s reform project in these responses suggests a confidence in the superiority of the French *mode* which, according to these writers, did not require the alterations that Wilde advocated. Diana Crane argues that if English efforts at dress reform lagged behind similar movements in the United States, France was even slower: “Dress reform was absent in France until 1887, when a society was formed with the goal of eliminating the corset.”<sup>52</sup> In that year, French accounts took notice of Constance Wilde’s work on reform, with coverage of British meetings of the Rational Dress Society. A writer remarked that at one meeting “Mrs. Oscar Wilde . . . simply expressed the opinion that ‘reform is necessary to render women’s fashion both more comfortable and more graceful,’” a view that some of the society members thought too moderate.<sup>53</sup> Without Wilde’s name attached, it is unlikely that such minutiae would have received much coverage, but the attention suggests that his reform efforts were beginning to be taken seriously.

Despite such growing interest, it remains the case that in French satirical magazines and fiction during the mid-1880s, Wilde remained primarily the “archetypal English aesthete” and little more.<sup>54</sup> In her serialized 1885 satirical story “Les Tournesols,” for example, Adèle Huguenin describes the aesthete as a man who “cultivates archaism, adores old pottery, old brass, fake colors, Byzantine painting, the mandolin, fatal poses and adverbs immeasurable. . . . His prophet is named Oscar Wilde, who went through America to preach dress reform.”<sup>55</sup> And an April 1885 satirical essay classifying types of British women readers lists the “L’Aesthetic” among the “Strong Minded Wooman” [*sic*], the “Peeress,” and the “Professional Beauty.” She risks infidelity to “Oscar Wilde and his aesthetic poems” by reading “*The story of Ida, epitaph of an Etrurian tomb, edited by her dear slade professor of fine art John Ruskin D. C. L.*” [*sic*].<sup>56</sup> At least, one might argue, Wilde’s poems were mentioned.

But with the passage of time comes distance, and by 1885 two publications by (ostensibly) French writers abroad reflect on Wilde’s American tour with a more detached view than those who covered it in real time. Both conclude that Wilde cannily exploited the market. Edmond de Mandat-Grancy, writing in one of his travelogues of the United States, describes the aesthetic phenomenon with considerable disdain but allows that no one had “demonstrated that [Wilde] was not very clever” and further notes that he had the “talent to use” others’ derision to his own ends; when the parodies of aestheticism hit the stage, Wilde gave lectures and “cashed colossal sums.”<sup>57</sup> In *La Société de Londres par un diplomate étranger* (*The Society of London, by a Foreign Diplomat*), the author describes Wilde’s affectations as a means of leveraging influence with his potential readership. He is “truly a wise young man and very learned,” the author notes, adding, “Men laughed at him, [but his performance] was a useful folly. Wilde looked silly, but he chose his measures with intelligence.”<sup>58</sup> Even when writers were pointedly critical of Wilde’s literary style, they nevertheless counted him among the ranks of serious authors. One writer ascribed the popularity of actress Ellen Terry to a “certain pathological state, a certain mental hysteria where one accepts Swinburne, Oscar Wilde, and *other Zolas* in the place of Shelley and of Byron.”<sup>59</sup> And though Wilde’s authorial reputation was surely not helped by the publication of the spuriously attributed silly novella *La Chasse à l’opossum* (1886), its appearance suggests that Wilde was an increasingly bankable author in France.

Meanwhile, Wilde’s essays, stories, and editorial work began to receive greater attention in the French press. His essay “Shakespeare and Stage Costume,” published in the *Nineteenth Century* in May 1885, was described in the *Revue contemporaine* as a “curious work by Oscar Wilde, the founder of the sect of aesthetes.”<sup>60</sup> As his other publications

appeared, they also received notice, primarily in journals such as *Le Livre* and *Polybiblion*, which regularly recorded major publications in France and abroad.<sup>61</sup> In 1888, *Le Livre* ran three announcements of the British and American publication of Wilde's fairy tales, in one case noting that the work featured a "great number of lovely illustrations by Walter Crane and Jacomb Hood."<sup>62</sup> The following year, it described the *Woman's World* as a "beautiful and elegant newspaper, which is written by women, under the direction of Mr. Oscar Wilde."<sup>63</sup> The *Journal des débats* praised Wilde's contribution to the 1888 Christmas number of the *Lady's Pictorial* as "jolie" and made note of the accompanying "charming drawings by M. B. Partridge."<sup>64</sup> In addition to citing work that Wilde did write, the French press on at least one occasion attributed work to him that was not his, such as when the 1887 *Bibliothèque universelle et revue suisse* mentioned in its "Chronique Anglaise" that a play titled "The Red Lamp," attributed to the "aesthete" Oscar Wilde, would premier at the Théâtre de la Comédie.<sup>65</sup>

### "A Compendium of this New Gospel of Art"

These brief notices track Wilde's literary output, but a far more telling indicator of French engagement with his prose is Marie Anne de Bovet's fascinating response to one of the first of Wilde's major works, "The Decay of Lying," published in January 1889 in the *Nineteenth Century*. Her "L'Esthétisme en Angleterre" ("Aestheticism in England") has been neglected to date in the critical literature, despite the fact that Wilde singled out her work for praise. Bovet is likely (and unfortunately) best known in Wilde scholarship as the recipient of one of his wittier lines, as Frank Harris recorded in his biography. Known for her plain looks, she is said to have quipped "N'est-ce pas, M. Wilde, que je suis la femme la plus laide de France?" ("Am I not, M. Wilde, the ugliest woman in France?"), to which "Oscar replied with smiling courtesy: 'Du monde, madame, du monde'" ("in the world, madame, in the world").<sup>66</sup> Wilde's acquaintance with Bovet seems to have begun before this interaction, and, to be sure, her reputation rested on more than her appearance. An astute literary critic, she was described in an 1893 issue of the *Dundee Evening Telegraph* as "one of the most distinguished of French lady journalists."<sup>67</sup> She went on to contribute to *La Fronde* in addition to a number of British journals.<sup>68</sup> Her lengthy article on Wilde was published in the Catholic-leaning fortnightly *Le Correspondant* on May 10, 1889, five months after Wilde's "The Decay of Lying" appeared in the *Nineteenth Century*.<sup>69</sup> After receiving a copy of the article from Bovet, Wilde responded (in English): "I am quite charmed by your delicate and subtle article on 'L'Esthétisme [sic] en Angleterre,' and thank you so much for sending it to me. The admirable English are

still much bewildered by 'The Decay of Lying,' but even here there are a few who can decipher its paradoxes. It is a pleasure for me to think that I am presented to Paris by so clever a pen as yours, and *je vous baise les mains*."<sup>70</sup> The fact that Wilde's letter to Bovet has been in print at least since Rupert Hart-Davis's edition of Wilde's correspondence was published in 1962 makes it all the more curious that her work has been overlooked in recent discussions of Wilde's French reception.

In her fifteen-page essay, Bovet situates Wilde's "The Decay of Lying" in relation to his broader oeuvre and the Aesthetic movement; she names Dante Gabriel Rossetti ("l'étrange peintre-poète"), Edward Burne-Jones, and Alfred Tennyson as examples of aesthetes along with Wilde, clearly linking (even conflating) the Pre-Raphaelite and Aesthetic schools. In the bulk of the essay, though, Bovet offers something between a detailed summary of Wilde's critical dialogue and a full translation of the work, which she terms a "brilliant and paradoxical dissertation."<sup>71</sup> Moreover, as she notes in her opening, she offers "The Decay of Lying" as the authoritative representative of the aesthetic movement: "I need only to summarize here [Wilde's] article, following it step-by-step, and the reader will have before his eyes a *compendium* of this new gospel of art."<sup>72</sup> For much of the remainder of her article, this is precisely what she does, offering a condensed version of Wilde's essay in which she renders entire stretches of the dialogue into French, even if her translations do not always retain the rhetorical verve of the original.

Indeed, Bovet's translations raise questions about how the French understood Wilde's wit. Offering an account of the dialogue rather than the dialogue itself is one reason for the shift in tone, which undercuts the personality that informs the speakers' contributions. Vivian's tenor, in particular, is blunted. Throughout "The Decay of Lying," Wilde amplifies Vivian's hauteur to the point that his sincerity is cast into doubt: "In literature we require distinction, charm, beauty, and imaginative power. We don't want to be harrowed and disgusted with an account of the doings of the lower orders."<sup>73</sup> Bovet gives the lines as "Ni les vices vulgaires, ni les plates vertus n'intéressent la littérature: ce qu'elle veut, c'est la distinction, le charme, la beauté, la fantaisie" ("Neither vulgar vices nor dull virtues are of interest to literature: what it wants is distinction, charm, beauty, fantasy"). Vivian's arch inflection and the suggestive snobbishness of the reference to the "doings of the lower orders" are transmuted into an aesthetic truism. Further accentuating this effect is the shifting role of French itself in the essay. Throughout Wilde's dialogue, French and British literature are equally derided for embracing a verisimilitude of the banal, and key French phrases (the realist author's "tedious '*document humain*'" or "his miserable little '*coin de la création*,' into which he peers with his microscope") stand

in for literary realism, their Frenchness essential to Vivian's indictment of Balzac's documentary impulse or Zola's naturalism.<sup>74</sup> Bovet jettisons the quotation marks and italics, confident, perhaps, that her French readers will recognize them: "Il compile ses insupportables documents humains, il fouille au microscope son misérable petit coin de la création" ("He compiles his unbearable human documents, he examines under a microscope his miserable little corner of creation").<sup>75</sup> She does, however, use italics for clichés that she renders in English, citing novelists who render "*five o'clock teas* et des parties de *lawn-tennis*."<sup>76</sup> Such choices are endemic to any translation, of course, and Bovet's goal is to introduce Wilde's aesthetic philosophy rather than to replicate his signature style; her stripping away of Wilde's allusions and figurative language may have been an effort to render his idiosyncratic English palatable to a French readership. Elsewhere, when Wilde's examples prove "little intelligible" to the French reader, Bovet supplies replacements: "Who among us did not try to live the adventures of Jean Paul Chopart or those of the Swiss Family Robinson, which are not only not real, but perfectly incredible? Overexcitement of the imagination, say the superficial; not at all, responds aestheticism, because the imagination is creative in its essence and always looking for a new form. It is indeed the instinct of life to imitate art."<sup>77</sup>

Bovet returned to Wilde's aesthetic philosophy from "The Decay of Lying" in a later article on the eighteenth-century novelist and playwright Pierre de Marivaux. She passionately defends Marivaux against charges of preciousness and artificiality. Challenging the critical use of "artificial" in "an offensive sense," she suggests that the root of "artificial" is "art" and that therefore "any product of art is artificial."<sup>78</sup> Wilde's essay provides support for her argument; whereas in "Esthétisme en Angleterre" she summarized and explicated Wilde's dialogue, in this essay she actively endorses it. "One of the most brilliant disciples of the new, curious English Aesthetic school," she notes, wrote that "since the essence of art is the chimera, the artist must not take his inspiration from nature."<sup>79</sup> In Bovet's view, the paradox is strong but the statement is nonetheless just. She once again extends his claims, suggesting that "M. Oscar Wilde might have added, given that life is but a lie, that the artist is only real if he lies."<sup>80</sup> With this grounding in place, Bovet stages an analysis of Marivaux's work that chips away at the then-predominant preference for naturalism that deemed his plays outmoded. Bovet equally defends "marivaudage," the bantering dialogue punctuated with paradoxes that was a signature feature of Marivaux's works and was both an obvious analogue for mannered aesthetic speech and a forbear of the witty dialogue of Wilde's society plays. In her view, Wilde's artistic theory not only described a temporary vogue but also facilitated the recovery of previous generations of writers, casting long-dismissed work in a fresh light.<sup>81</sup>

Bovet was neither the first nor the only person to notice “The Decay of Lying” in France shortly after its publication. A March 1889 review of Paul Lenoir’s *Histoire du réalisme* offers only a limited endorsement of Lenoir’s account (“j’opine du bonnet en général aux définitions de M. Paul Lenoir”) but “applauds wholeheartedly” the “very remarkable article by Oscar Wilde,” a “humorous dialogue where the author develops the thesis that reality is modeled on art as opposed to art on reality; and he laments the current decline of the imagination, invention, the ideal, and, in a word, the beautiful art of lying.”<sup>82</sup> Ultimately, the reviewer concludes that the difference between those advocating realism and those advocating idealism was simply a “war of words.”<sup>83</sup> This review does not provide a particularly nuanced assessment of literary realism in Wilde’s work, but it shows that his essays were read and that they were interpreted in relation to French literary scholarship of the day. A June 1890 review on realism in literature adopts a similar tactic, discussing “The Decay of Lying” at length and presenting it as a useful counterpoint to theories of the realism/idealism binary as articulated in French criticism. It asserts that readers “should not be surprised by the new aesthetic doctrine recently issued in England.”<sup>84</sup> The article notes that for Wilde, “it is not art that is the reflection or the echo of life, but life that reproduces and repeats art (the influence of books, statues, paintings, derangement of mind produced today by novels).”<sup>85</sup> The reviewer then quotes from “The Decay of Lying”: “A day will come when, tired of this flat truth, of this vulgar reality, of this poverty of imagination, of this frenzied documentation that poisons art and which degrades the ideal, the world shall worship at the feet of imposture!”<sup>86</sup>

### “Dernières Publications”

As the speakers in Wilde’s “The Decay of Lying” knew, tastes are fluid: once the world is “tired of the flat truth,” it will embrace the beautiful lie. The literary record is equally fluid, a point thoroughly demonstrated by Wilde’s literary reputation during his life and after his death. The 1880s proved to be as important a decade in his changeable career as any: in the 1886 addendum to the *Dictionnaire universel des contemporains* (a work purporting to list “all the notable people of France and of foreign countries”), Wilde’s name is not mentioned, but the updated 1893 edition includes an entry on Wilde that offers a relatively complete picture of his work. It avoids mentioning his eccentricities, and its only nod to his aesthetic roots is to note that he “was the head of a movement to reform aesthetics.”<sup>87</sup> Moreover, the entry documents in some detail Wilde’s periodical contributions: “M. Oscar Wilde has furnished a number of articles of literary criticism to diverse journals and reviews: *Nineteenth Century*, *Fortnightly Review*, *Pall Mall Gazette*, *Saturday review*, *Athenaeum*, etc.”<sup>88</sup>

Wilde's extensive journalism of the previous decade had become part of his French biography.

In this article, I have aimed to offer a survey of the French periodical press's coverage of Wilde's work during the 1880s, but I did not intend to provide an exhaustive list. With the abundance of material now available through digitization and enhanced cataloguing, the account of Wilde's French reception can only expand in the future. Even fundamental bibliographical details remain to be fleshed out: for example, while the first acknowledged French translation of Wilde's *The House of Pomegranates* is Georges Khnopff's edition, which appeared in 1902 from Editions de la Plume, at least two of Khnopff's translations appeared in periodicals some six years earlier.<sup>89</sup> "The Young King" ("Le Jeune Roi") and "The Fisherman and his Soul" ("Le Pêcheur et son âme") were published in *La Société nouvelle: Revue internationale* in 1894.<sup>90</sup> I suggested at the start of this article that the long shadow cast by the earliest biographies of Wilde is at least in part to blame for some of the omissions of these works from extant scholarly assessments of Wilde's treatment in France. Sherard's biography quotes from a piece by Henri de Régnier on Oscar Wilde from the *Revue Blue* that lists Wyzewa and Le Roux as French critics of Wilde's work; these names are routinely cited in the later critical literature as the first writers on Wilde in French. Sherard's biography does not mention Bovet or Geffroy, and they have remained conspicuously absent from later scholarship.<sup>91</sup> Even as biographies might elide the presence of some authors or texts, reading existing biographies and Wilde's correspondence in tandem might also suggest directions for further research. For example, Gabriel Sarrazin does not appear in Sherard's biography (or many other biographies of Wilde), but he, like Marie Anne de Bovet, does figure in Wilde's letters. In 1885, Sarrazin sent Wilde a copy of his recently published *Poètes modernes en Angleterre*. (In response, Wilde thanked him and promised to send a volume of his *Poems*.<sup>92</sup>) Sarrazin demonstrated his high regard for Wilde's verse when, in his 1889 book *La renaissance de la poésie anglaise, 1798–1889*, he cites "l'éloquente pièce d'Humanité d'Oscar Wilde" as a poem that had not yet received its due regard as a classic of the poetic renaissance occurring in England.<sup>93</sup> Sarrazin later published articles in the *Universal Review* and the *Athenaeum* and contributed to the *Woman's World* when Wilde was its editor. Sarrazin exemplifies the international critical investment in Wilde's circle that was built through the French press's complex engagement with Wilde's early writing. A fuller understanding of the bibliographical record enriches the reception history of Wilde's work and biography, but the reverse is also true.

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## NOTES

1. Sherard, "Oscar Wilde," 2. In its original form, the passage reads, "Pour voir un homme heureux, il faut le voir dans quelque coin de quelque grand restaurant du boulevard, dinant à la française et causant de choses françaises avec ceux qui aiment la France." Sherard's essay was translated by Henry Blanchamp and reprinted in *Oscar Wilde: The Story of an Unhappy Friendship*, 258–70. I am deeply grateful to Aimee Kilbane for reviewing the French passages in this article. Here and throughout, all translations—and any concomitant errors—are my own.
2. Ibid. The original passage reads, "On eût dit le jeune poète écœuré par tant de malveillance d'un côté et par tant de popularité méprisée de l'autre. Pendant de longues années, il garda le silence et, à part quelques préfaces de complaisance et quelques articles dans les revues, ne donna plus rien de sa plume."
3. Ibid. The original passage reads, "De tous côtés, on le pressa de rompre le silence méprisant qu'il s'était imposé. Heureusement, les arguments de ses amis prévalurent, et ce tut [sic] avec son roman le *Portrait de Dorian Gray*, que Oscar Wilde de nouveau affronta le public et la critique anglaise." Reprinted in Sherard, *Oscar Wilde*, 264.
4. The astonishing extent of Wilde's periodical writing has recently been traced, for example, in John Stokes and Mark W. Turner's exceptional two-volume contribution to *The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde*.
5. Stokes, "Oscar Wilde in France," 60.
6. In "The French Trials of Oscar Wilde," Erber describes Wyzewa's April 1892 essay in the weekly *Revue bleue* as the "first comprehensive study of Wilde's work" (559). Hibbitt writes, "In April 1892 the first extensive critical assessment of Wilde's work was published, a six-page article in *La Revue bleue* entitled 'M. Oscar Wilde et les jeunes littérateurs anglais' (Mr Oscar Wilde and the young English writers) by the critic Téodor de Wyzewa (1892), co-editor of the Symbolist journal *La Revue wagnérienne* (Wagnerian review)." Hibbitt, "Artist as Aesthete," 71. In a 2013 article, Hibbitt describes the piece as "one of the earliest critical responses to Oscar Wilde's works in France." Hibbitt, "Oscar Wilde and *la critique impressioniste*," n.p.
7. Wyzewa, "M. Oscar Wilde," 423. The original text reads, "Avant le mois de décembre 1891, où M. Wilde est venu à Paris, les Anglais, ses compatriotes, ne savaient pas l'apprécier." He continues, "Thereupon Wilde came to Paris; and when he left, after a one-month stay, to return to London, an entirely new fame had preceded him. It is currently spreading to the United States, to India, throughout the whole world. . . . Immediately upon his arrival in France, Wilde appeared to us, (as Frenchmen), as an



extraordinary character." The original text reads, "Là-dessus M. Wilde est venu à Paris; et quand il est reparti, après un mois de séjour, pour rentrer à Londres, une gloire toute nouvelle l'y avait précédé. Elle est en train de se répandre aux États-Unis, aux Indes, dans le monde entier . . . tout de suite, dès son arrivée à Paris, M. Wilde nous est apparu, à nous autres Français, comme un personnage extraordinaire." The *Revue bleue* was one of the premier journals of the day for contemporary literature which had a reputation for publishing the works (and advancing the careers) of important writers. See Lux, *Histoire de deux revues françaises*.

8. Le Roux, "Oscar Wilde," 3. The original text reads, "Et pourtant cet écrivain jouit en Angleterre, en Amérique, dans tous les pays de langue britannique, d'une popularité qui s'attache autant à sa personne qu'à ses œuvres."
9. Le Roux, "Oscar Wilde," 3; Wyzewa, "M. Oscar Wilde," 423. Le Roux's original text reads, "Je gagerais que beaucoup de lecteurs de ce journal entendront prononcer ici, pour la première fois, le nom de M. Oscar Wilde." Wyzewa's reads, "On ne nous a rien montré de ses œuvres, je crois, à l'exception d'un petit conte moral sans grande importance." Wyzewa presumably refers to Stuart Merrill's 1889 translation of "The Birthday of the Infanta."
10. For details on Wilde's honeymoon, see chapter 2 of Lottman's *Oscar Wilde à Paris*. Lottman claims that he searched in vain for details of Wilde's earlier trip to Paris in 1874 with his mother and brother. Stokes notes that "there had already been several briefer visits" prior to Wilde's 1883 arrival, though the details of such visits are similarly scarce. Stokes, "Oscar Wilde and France," 61.
11. It seems unlikely that Wilde did not visit France in the intervening years, but I have been unable to locate any evidence that he did so. Nor did Mead (*Oscar Wilde in Paris*, 3) or Langlade (*Oscar Wilde*, 24–25), both of whom support the timeline given here.
12. Ellmann, *Oscar Wilde*, 213.
13. See Cohen, "Wilde's French," 233–59.
14. Evangelista, "Oscar Wilde," 3–4.
15. Other studies focus on the post-1895 years: Wan, "From the Rack to the Press"; Eells, "Naturalizing Oscar Wilde as an *homme de lettres*"; Reid, "André Gide's 'Hommage à Oscar Wilde.'"
16. Erber, "French Trials of Oscar Wilde," 553.
17. Hibbitt, "Artist as Aesthete," 67–68.
18. *Ibid.*, 74.
19. Barnaby, "Timeline of the European Reception of Oscar Wilde," xxiii.
20. Donohue, introduction to Wilde, *Plays I*, 328.
21. "Chroniques des livres," *La Plume*, October 15, 1895. Cited in Donohue's introduction to Wilde, *Plays I*, 330.
22. Charle, *Le Siècle de la presse*, 169.

23. Knight, "Correspondences étrangers," 594–95. This review is not included in Karl Beckson's *Critical Heritage*, and I have not been able to locate any other citation of it. The original text reads, "Je n'insisterai pas sur les productions de ces esthéticiens, comme ils s'appellent eux-mêmes: ce serait mettre à une trop rude épreuve la patience de vos lecteurs. Je dirai seulement que leur religion semble être un nouveau développement du mouvement qui s'est produit en faveur de l'école de peinture connu sous le nom de pré-raphaélisme."
24. *Ibid.*, 595. The original text reads, "Le poème intitulé *Charmidès*, le plus long et le plus important du volume, dépasse par l'audace avec laquelle le sujet est traité tout ce qu'on trouve dans *les Fleurs du mal*, et affecte une crudité que rien n'égale dans la littérature contemporaine."
25. *Ibid.* The original text reads, "Pour le reste, tout en prouvant que M. Wilde possède une veine de véritable poésie, ce livre est avant tout remarquable comme un échantillon de ce *gongorisme* qui, depuis que nos jeunes poètes visent à être des stylistes, a envahi notre littérature."
26. See Knight, "Correspondences étrangers; Angleterre," 722–24. Knight's biographer notes that this response "was probably the last letter Dante Rossetti ever wrote." Francis, *Notes by the Way*, xxv–vi.
27. Wilde, "Cheap Edition," 5.
28. *Ibid.*
29. See Ellmann, *Oscar Wilde*, 345; Harris, *Oscar Wilde*, 1:140. Knight was the theater critic for the *Athenaeum* from 1869, and in 1893 he published a collection of his writing on the theater but did not mention Wilde. In 2010, Knight's copy of Wilde's *Poems* sold at auction for \$549. "Lot 6184."
30. "Lettres d'Angleterre," *Le Temps*, 3. The novelty of the movement is clear even in the negotiation of its title: variants include "esthétisme," "esthéticisme," "aesthetic," and "esthétique."
31. *Ibid.* The original text reads, "Tous les yeux s'arrêtèrent d'abord sur un jeune écrivain irlandais, qui avait eu des succès à Oxford. . . . Pour accroître encore son prestige, le jeune pontife des 'esthètes,' après avoir publié un volume de vers, vient de faire voile pour l'Amérique, où sa renommée l'avait précédé, et où l'opérette de Gilbert et Sullivan lui avait assuré au moins un succès de curiosité."
32. Gilbert, "Les *Æsthetics*," 1–2. The original text reads, "Ce personnage est certainement en-train de lire les derniers poèmes du poète *æsthétic* par excellence, Oscar Wilde, un grand garçon de trente ans celui-là qui est en train maintenant de parcourir l'Amérique et le Japon en faisant des lectures sur l'*Æsthéticisme*, et à peu près habillé comme celui décrit plus haut. Il a récolté sur son passage déjà pas mal de rires et de moqueries, mais aussi pas mal de dollars." The readers of the well-respected, Royalist *Le Gaulois* would likely have been sympathetic to the dubious tone of the piece. See Brunet, *Pour Oscar Wilde*, 102–3.

33. "Chronique anglaise," March 1882, 556. The original text reads, "Le grand prêtre du vêtement est un jeune ambitieux nommé Oscar Wilde, qui fait en ce moment une tournée aux Etats-Unis pour se rendre célèbre en convertissant le yankee à l'esthétique. J'ai sous les yeux des journaux américains rendant compte de ses exploits."
34. "Chronique anglaise," August 1882, 370. The original text reads, "En Angleterre la secte des esthètes languit, privée de son orateur, le jeune Oscar Wilde. On se rappelle peut-être que M. Oscar Wilde était allé prêcher la réforme du costume et la renaissance du goût aux Yankees."
35. *Le Figaro*, for example, introduced Wilde as the "grand-prêtre de l'esthétisme" in a May 1882 installment of its "Correspondance anglaise," 3. It repeated this phrase later that month in [Paris], "Nouvelle Diverses," 6.
36. [Outre-Mer], "Correspondance d'Amérique," 204. The original text reads, "Le drame nihiliste d'Oscar Wilde, *Vera*, donne lieu aux critiques les plus diverses, ce qui n'empêche pas l'auteur de le considérer comme un succès. La vérité est qu'il y a des longueurs et que le plan est défectueux, mais les scènes comiques ou pittoresques qu'il contient suffiront pour le faire accepter par la masse des spectateurs américains."
37. Ibid. The original text reads, "Oscar Wilde vient de terminer un autre drame en cinq actes, *la Duchesse de Padoue*. L'action se passe au quinzième siècle, en Italie. L'auteur anglais veut évidemment exploiter la mine fructueuse des théâtres américains. . . . Je vous tiendrai au courant de ses tentatives."
38. For a full account of Wilde's British lectures, see Dibb, *Oscar Wilde*. In 1885, a Dublin paper noted with some surprise that Wilde "was plainly attired" and without "extravagances in his manner" during his lecture. "Mr. Oscar Wilde on Dress," 7. A year later, the *Agricultural Journal* affirmed that Wilde "no longer wears breeches of picturesque cut." "Country Gentleman," 1464.
39. Wilde, "Philosophy of Dress," 9. See also Cooper, *Oscar Wilde on Dress*.
40. "Réforme du costume," January 25, 1885, 3. The original text reads, "On sait qu'un apôtre d'un nouveau genre, M. Oscar Wilde, poursuit depuis quelque temps, en Angleterre, une croisade contre le costume contemporain, et s'attache à en démontrer l'absurdité."
41. Wilde, "More Radical Ideas upon Dress Reform."
42. "Réforme du costume," January 25, 1885, 3; my emphasis. The original text reads, "Comme il arrive souvent aux réformateurs, M. Oscar Wilde a beau jeu quand il s'en tient à la critique de ce qui est; où il devient plus difficile à suivre, c'est quand il veut formuler d'après des principes rationnels ce que doit être le costume de l'avenir."
43. Ibid.

44. Ibid. The original text reads, "M. Oscar Wilde est trop ambitieux en s'attaquant à tout le costume à la fois. Qu'il limite sa propagande à un seul objet, et nous délivre seulement, par exemple, du monstrueux, de l'horrible chapeau haut de forme! Il n'en faudrait pas plus pour le ranger parmi les bienfaiteurs de l'humanité."
45. "Fait divers," 4; "Causerie hebdomadaire," 3.
46. Charle, *Le Siècle de la presse*, 160; Orwicz, *Art Criticism and Its Institutions*, 167.
47. "Révolution dans la mode," 2. The original text reads, "M. Oscar Wilde, en stratéliste consommé, fait porter son effort sur deux points à la fois: l'esthétique et l'hygiène, la beauté et la commodité, l'agréable et l'utile."
48. Geffroy, "Le Chapeau haut de forme," 1-2. This essay was reprinted in *Notes d'un journaliste: Vie, littérature, théâtre*.
49. Ibid., 1. The original text reads, "Il s'agit de prouver que les pardessus, les redingotes, les gilets, les pantalons, ne sont ni hygiéniques, ni commodes, ni élégants."
50. Ibid., 2. The original text reads, "Ne saviez-vous donc pas cela, M. Oscar Wilde, pour être ainsi hanté par des idées bleues et roses, par des souvenirs de bas de soie et de bottes molles, ne saviez-vous donc pas que nos étoffes étaient de la couleur de nos pensées et que le hideux et torturant chapeau haut de forme que nous portons n'était que le significatif emblème de notre mélancolie?"
51. "Courrier de Paris," 307. The original reads, "Il veut nous persuader de quitter l'habit noir qui nous va si mal et de prendre l'habit rose qui nous irait si bien."
52. Crane, *Fashion and Its Social Agendas*, 113.
53. [Frollo], "Liberté du costume," 1. The original text reads, "Mistress Oscar Wilde en a proposé un, exprimant seulement l'opinion 'qu'une réforme est nécessaire pour rendre le costume féminin à la fois plus confortable et plus gracieux.' Cet ordre du jour a paru à beaucoup de membres entaché de modérantisme. Cependant, appuyé par mistress Fenwick Miller, il a fini par être voté par l'assemblée." See also "Réforme du costume," April 4, 1886, 3.
54. Hibbitt, "Artist as Aesthete," 65.
55. Combe, "Tournesols," 162. The story was reprinted in *Jeune Angleterre* in 1887. The original text reads, "[L'esthète] cultive l'archaïsme, il adore les vieilles faïences, les vieux cuivres, les couleurs fausses, la peinture byzantine, la mandoline, les poses fatales et les adverbes incommensurables. . . . Son prophète se nomme Oscar Wilde et parcourait l'autre jour l'Amérique pour y prêcher la réforme du costume."
56. "Liseuses anglaises," 243. The original text reads, "Elle relit pour la vingt-cinquième fois, *The story of Ida, epitaph of an Etrurian tomb*, edited par son cher slade professor of fine art John Ruskin, D. C. L. Quoique

- lugubre, cette épitaphe étrusque est un délassement pour elle. C'est la seule infidélité qu'elle fasse à Oscar Wilde et à ses poèmes esthétiques."
57. Mandat-Grancey, *En visite chez l'oncle Sam*, 134. The original text reads, "Tous les partisans de M. Oscar Wylde étaient de bons toqués, mais il n'a jamais été bien démontré que lui-même ne fût pas très-malin. . . . Il avait, surtout, au plus haut point, le talent de se servir des réclames que lui faisaient ceux qui se moquaient de lui. Une pièce, intitulée *The Colonel*, parodiait d'une façon très-amusante ses doctrines. Elle eut un succès fou dans toute l'Angleterre. Partout où on la jouait, 'Oscar' arrivait et donnait des conférences. Tous ceux qui avaient vu la pièce voulurent l'entendre. Il encaissa des sommes colossales."
  58. [Escott], *Société de Londres*, 278. This work is attributed variously to Thomas Hay Sweet Escott and Catherine Radziwill. The original text reads, "C'est en vérité un jeune homme sagace et très savant. Il me rappelle toujours Brutus, qui, pour réussir dans ses projets, feignit d'être idiot. M. Oscar Wilde vit que s'il y avait quelque chose à faire avec des facultés médiocres, il devait nécessairement faire sensation. . . . Les hommes rirent de lui, mais c'était une folie utile. M. Wilde avait l'air niais, mais il prit ses mesures avec intelligence." The author goes on to note that Whistler's eventual success was due to his "following the example of Oscar Wilde" ("Il est apprécié de ses confrères et pour eux c'est un grand peintre, mais s'il n'avait pas suivi l'exemple de M. Oscar Wilde, son nom serait relativement inconnu"). [Escott], *Société de Londres*, 320.
  59. [Bull], "Correspondances," 264; his emphasis. The original text reads, "Pour l'Angleterre qui a compté de si illustres tragédiennes, Ellen Terry marque plus que toute autre chose la décadence du goût en matière d'art dramatique. Sans beauté, dans ce pays où la beauté tient lieu de tout, on se perd à rechercher ce qui peut être la raison de sa popularité et on est forcé de conclure à un certain état pathologique, à une certaine hystérie mentale où l'on accepte Swinburne, Oscar Wilde et *autres Zolas* à la place de Shelley et de Byron." The author conflates the style of Swinburne's and Wilde's poetry with the naturalism of Zola, an error that Marie Anne de Bovet soon corrected in her piece on Wilde's "The Decay of Lying."
  60. "Articles littéraires," 148. The original text reads, "*Nineteenth Century* (1<sup>er</sup> mai). Un curieux travail de M. Oscar Wilde, le fondateur de la secte des *æsthetes* sur *Shakespeare et le costume au théâtre*."
  61. "The Decay of Lying: A Dialogue" is listed in "Sommaires des recueils périodiques," 77.
  62. "Publications Nouvelles," May 10, 1888, 260. The original text reads, "L'éditeur Nutt annonce . . . un nouveau livre de Mr. Oscar Wilde *Five Fairy Tales* (Cinq contes de fées), illustré par Mr. Walter Crane et par Mr. Jacomb Hood." Subsequent notices of the collection appeared on August 10 and October 10, 1888.

63. "A travers journaux et périodiques," 382. The original text reads, "*The Woman's World* (mai), ce beau et élégant journal, qui n'est rédigé que par des femmes, sous la direction de Mr. Oscar Wilde, nous donne, au milieu de beaucoup d'articles intéressants, un essai sur les carrières ouvertes aux femmes (*Field-Work for Women*), par Ouida, avec illustrations de l'auteur, qui ne se contente pas d'être une des premières romancières de ce temps-ci, et quelques pages, signées miss E. Hawker, sur Mme de Récamier."
64. "Lettres d'Angleterre," *Journal des débats*, 2. The original text reads, "De tous les numéros de Noël, le plus réussi, le plus artistique est sans contredit celui d'un journal de dames, le *Lady's Pictorial*, qui l'emporte sur ses concurrents au point de vue du texte et des dessins. Il y a dans ce numéro une jolie Nouvelle de M. Oscar Wilde ornée de charmans dessins de M. B. Partridge."
65. "Chronique anglaise," July 1887, 177. The original text reads, "*The red Lamp*, au Théâtre de la Comédie, une pièce de genre qui a été attribuée à 'l'esthète' M. Oscar Wilde." The play was actually written by W. Outram Tristram.
66. Harris, *Life and Confessions*, 417–18. As Rose notes, there is some disagreement as to whether or not Bovet was the respondent in this exchange. See "Rencontres parisiennes," 10.
67. "Notes, Mainly Personal," 2.
68. For a discussion of Bovet's contributions as *frondeuse*, see Roberts, "Subversive Copy," 323. In August 1889, Bovet contributed "Gounod's Views on Art and Artists" to the *Fortnightly*; it was reprinted in the *Eclectic Magazine* that October. Her *Lettres d'Irlande* received wide coverage in the British press.
69. Wilde, "Decay of Lying," 35–56.
70. Letter from Oscar Wilde to Marie-Anne de Bovet, dated "early 1889" in Wilde, *Complete Letters*, 393.
71. Bovet, "Esthétisme en Angleterre," 581, 582. The original text reads, "En mettant sous la forme démodée du dialogue sa brillante et paradoxale dissertation, l'auteur en a par ce détail même indiqué le caractère antimoderniste, qu'accroissent encore les noms fantaisistes des deux interlocuteurs."
72. *Ibid.*, 582. The original text reads, "Je n'ai qu'à résumer ici son article en le suivant pas à pas, et le lecteur aura sous les yeux le *compendium* de ce nouvel évangile de l'art."
73. Wilde, "Decay of Lying," 39.
74. *Ibid.*, 37.
75. Bovet, "Esthétisme en Angleterre," 583.
76. *Ibid.*
77. *Ibid.*, 589. The original text reads, "Qui de nous n'a pas essayé de vivre les aventures de Jean-Paul Chopart ou celles du Robinson suisse, lesquelles non seulement ne sont pas vraies, mais parfaitement invraisemblables? Surexci-

- tation de l'imagination, disent les esprits superficiels. Pas du tout, répond l'esthétisme, car l'imagination est créatrice par essence et cherche toujours une forme nouvelle. C'est bel et bien l'instinct de la vie à imiter l'art."
78. Bovet, "Marivaux Romancier," 360. The original text reads, "Que signifie aussi l'épithète d'artificiel employée par ces critiques moroses dans une acception offensante? Si je sais le français, cet adjectif dérive du nom 'art': tout produit de l'art est artificiel."
  79. Ibid. The original text reads, "Un des plus brillants disciples de la nouvelle et si curieuse école esthétique anglaise a écrit que l'essence de l'art étant la chimère, l'artiste ne doit pas s'inspirer de la nature."
  80. Ibid., 360–61. The original text reads, "Le paradoxe est fort, mais il ne faut pas s'en choquer: à y regarder de près, rien n'est plus juste. M. Oscar Wilde aurait pu ajouter que la vie n'étant que mensonge, l'artiste n'est vraiment réel que s'il ment."
  81. A contributor to *Lippincott's* also noted the connection between *marivaudage* and the aesthetic, writing that "it is analogous to our word 'preciousness' as applied to the Oscar Wilde aesthetes, or 'euphuism' as applied to the Sir Percy Shaftons of Queen Elizabeth's day, and it means a certain affected style of writing which was brought into fashion by Pierre Carlet de Marivaux in his unfinished novel 'Marianne' (1731)." "Our Monthly Gossip," 284.
  82. [E. C.], "Critique littéraire du mois," 135. The original text reads, "d'un très remarquable article de M. Oscar Wilde, paru dans le numéro de janvier de *The Nineteenth Century* et intitulé: *The Decay of Lying*. C'est un dialogue humoristique où l'auteur développe cette thèse, que la réalité se modèle sur l'art bien plutôt que l'art sur la réalité; et il pleure sur la décadence actuelle de l'imagination, de l'invention, de l'idéal, et, en un mot, du bel art du mensonge. Cet antagonisme entre les deux écrivains existe seulement dans la forme extérieure, ils sont d'accord sur le fond des idées, et le dissentiment apparent tient uniquement à ce que chacun d'eux tire les mots à soi et leur donne des sens différents. Je le disais bien: une querelle de mots."
  83. Ibid.
  84. "Classe en rhétorique," 187. The original text reads, "Aussi ne faut-il point s'étonner de la nouvelle doctrine esthétique émise récemment en Angleterre par Oscar Wilde."
  85. Ibid. The original text reads, "D'après Wilde . . . ce n'est point l'art qui est le reflet ou l'écho de la vie, mais la vie qui reproduit et répète l'art (influence des livres, statues, tableaux, détraquement d'esprit produit aujourd'hui par les romans)."
  86. Ibid. The original text reads, "Un jour viendra où, excédé de cette plate véracité, de cette réalité vulgaire, de cette pauvreté d'imagination, de cette documentation forcenée qui empoisonnent l'art, qui avilissent l'idéal, le

monde se prosternera aux pieds de l'imposture!" The translation is identical to Marie Anne de Bovet's, save for the omission of a phrase she had included and the addition of the final exclamation point.

87. "Wilde," 1596.

88. Ibid.

89. See the bibliography in Evangelista, *Reception of Oscar Wilde in Europe*, 308.

90. Wilde, "Jeune Roi," 153-64; "Pêcheur et son âme," 85-100, 295-309.

91. Mikhail's *Oscar Wilde: An Annotated Bibliography* includes Wyzewa's piece but not the others detailed in this article.

92. See Wilde, *Complete Letters*, 273.

93. Sarrazin, *La renaissance de la poésie anglaise*, xiii.

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